

1: Holmberg--33 [4]
116, 262, 784, 888

(1941-42) 1950

Siriono

"The few food taboos that do prevail among the Siriono have almost exclusive reference to the animal world. Agricultural products and wild foods collected from the forest are never taboo; they can be eaten on all occasions, by all age groups, and by both sexes. Free of all food taboos, including certain kinds of meat which are forbidden to others, are the aged, that is, those who have passed child-bearing age or possess grown children. Since the Siriono do not practice fasting of any kind, even ceremonially, the aged can thus eat anything at any time."

"There are, in fact, certain meat foods that are supposed to be eaten only by the aged. These include the harpy eagle, the anteater, the owl monkey, and the howler monkey. Since the aged usually get only the left-overs of other food, the society thus seems to have provided for them in some way by reserving these animals exclusively for their use. Under conditions of need, however, I have frequently seen them eaten by people who were not supposed to eat them; only when [34] other animals are relatively plentiful are the taboos strictly observed.

Apart from the above-mentioned food taboos there are few others. Since these latter will be discussed on the occasions when they prevail they will not be mentioned here."

"Between parents and young children there is little reserve. The latter are treated very indulgently and are seldom punished for breaches of custom. As children grow older, however, they are expected to respect and to obey their parents, who treat them roughly in case they do not. A person's respect for his parents continues after marriage until the latter grow old and useless, after which little concern is shown for them."

"Some of these food taboos [MPK: During pregnancy] are generalized to the father, but not all of them. The only ones which he usually observes are the restrictions on eating harpy eagle, anteater, and howler monkey, which in a strict sense are not pregnancy taboos, since these animals are never supposed to be eaten by anyone but an old person. However, these food taboos seem to be more carefully observed by the men when their wives are pregnant."

"The aged experience an unpleasant time of it in Siriono society. Since status is determined largely by immediate utility to the group, the inability of the aged to compete with the younger members of the society places them somewhat in the category of excess baggage. Having outlived their usefulness, they are relegated to a position of obscurity. Actually the aged are quite a burden. They eat but are unable to hunt, fish or collect food; they sometimes hoard a young spouse but are unable to beget children; they move at a snail's pace and hinder the mobility of the group."

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Siriono

"Where existence depends upon direct utility, however, longevity is not great. The aged and infirm are weeded out shortly after their decrepitude begins to appear. Consequently, the Siriono band rarely contains many members who belong to generations above the parent or below the child. At Tibaera there were only four grandparent-grandchild relationships, and great-grandparents and great-grandchildren did not exist. Although this is a hazardous guess, the average life span of the Siriono—discounting infant mortality—probably falls somewhere between the ages of 35 and 40."

"When a person becomes too ill or infirm to follow the fortunes of the band, he is abandoned to shift for himself. Since this was the fate of a sick Indian whom I knew, the details of her case will best serve to illustrate the treatment accorded the aged in Siriono society. The case in question occurred while I was wandering with the Indians near Yaguarú, Guarayos. The band decided to make a move in the direction of the Rio Blanco. While they were making preparations for the journey, my attention was called to a middle-aged woman who was lying sick in her hammock, too sick to speak. I inquired of the chief what they planned to do with her. He referred me to her husband who told me that she would be left to die because she was too ill to walk and because she was going to die anyway. Departure was scheduled for the following morning. I was on hand to observe the event. The entire band walked out of the camp without so much as a farewell to the dying woman. Even her husband departed without saying good-by. She was left with a fire, a calabash of water, her personal belongings, and nothing more. She was too sick to protest.

After the band had left, I set out in company with a number of Indians for the Mission of Yaguarú to cure myself of an eye ailment. On my return about 3 weeks later, I passed by the same spot again. I went into the house, but found no sign of the woman there. I continued my journey down the trail in the direction of Tibaera and soon came upon a hut in which the band had camped the day I parted from them. Just outside of this shelter were the remains (and hammock) of the sick woman. By this time, of

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Siriono-2

course, the ants and vultures had stripped the bones clean. She had tried her utmost to follow the fortunes of the band, but had failed and had experienced the same fate that is accorded all Siriono whose days of utility are over. "